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ABSTRACT

This report, given at a special meeting held in Tehran, discusses the creation and publication of children's books in India, most of which came into being only after India achieved independence. Now both private publishers and government agencies supplement one another in publishing various types of books--fiction, science, biography, adventure, and comic. (JM)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE SERVICE OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND PEACEFUL CO-OPERATION

ORGANIZED BY THE
INSTITUTE FOR THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS
IN COOPERATION WITH UNESCO AND THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO IN IRAN

15-21 MAY 1975 , TEHRAN

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Children's Literature in the Service of

International Understanding and Peaceful CO-operation

Tehran, 15-21 May 1975

Children's Books in India

Mohini Rao

India

This is a great occasion for all those who are associated with the creation and publication of children's books, and we are grateful to the organisers for providing us this unique opportunity At a time when international understanding and co-operation are hard to achieve in other fields, children's writers and publishers have established once again that they are free from all prejudices and are eager to combine their efforts to achieve their common goal of providing the best reading material for children.

It is heartening to see the importance given to children's books all over the world today. Whatever the political ideology of a country, its young people are its chief concern and this concern is growing into anxious in the present-day context. We want our children to grow up into well-integrated human beings, strong in body and mind, peace-loving, honest and hard working. It is our anxiety to protect them and look after them as they are our greatest wealth. This is one shere where our interests are common and one forum where the maximum can be achieved and where the efforts are always a source of pleasure.

We read and hear of 'cultural clashes' and 'cultural shocks'. We do not talk of barriers created by science, since it does not create any. Scientific knowledge has helped remove cultural barriers

and has brought us closer to the one world concept. Respect can come only through understanding, and the main task set before all those gathered here is to promote this understanding in children by making their outlook more scientific, at the same time taking care that their literature does not suffer from emotional insufficiency.

Whether we write to inform or to entertain this is one area where our aims have to be lofty. We have to uphold the highest universal human values. Along with parents and teachers, writers are also responsible to a great extent in moulding the minds of the future generations. It is dangerous to let children enter adult life with warpdd ideas, selfish motives and a distorted value system.

Children's Books in India

In India children's books came into their own only after Independence. We had, of course, a rich heritage of classics like the panchatantra, the Jatakas, Hitopadesa, Kathasaritsagar, etc. Which have inspired writers all over the world. They have been tranalated and adapted over and over again not only into all Indian languages but also in several languages all over the world. Children's literature, as we understand it today, developed after Independence. Before that we depended a great deal on imported books and there was little encouragement for the development of indegenous children's literature. Jack and Jill and Little Tommy Tucker had found their place in all educated homes. Indian publications did not pay much attention to the quality of production. Writing or illustrating children's books was not considered a specialized field.

After Independence the Government began paying attention to this

very important but much neglected subject. It provided incentives to writers as well as publishers by instituting yearly competitinns for children's writers in all languages. Authors of the best books are given cash prizes and the Government makes bulk purchases of the prize-winning books for free distribution to libraries.

The Government also took up the publication of children's books through its various publishing agencies, primarily with the object of providing inexpensive books. The National Book Trust, National Council fo Educational Research and Training and The publication Division are the main State Publishing agencies. One big step towards the promotion of children's books was the setting up of the Children's Book Trust which laid emphasis on illustrations and the quality of production.

India has 16 major languages, and each language grows independent of the other. Under the circumstances we had few books which all children could read. This was important to foster a sense of unity and oneness among children. With this objective the National Book Trust Launched a project of children's books known as Nehru Library for Children. These books are published in English and 12 major Indian languages simultaneously and they are inexpensive. It is a very big project and is the first of its kind in India.

Thus the private publishers and the Government agencies supplement each otehr's efforts. But this is just a beginning. In a country where there are 516,000 primary schools and 97 million children below the age of 12, we have to make an effort on a gigantic scale to meet the need. And the need at the moment is not so much for

well produced good books available at the lowest possible cost.

Types of Books

As Indians are essentially traditional people they like their children to have a good background of their traditions, stories from the classics andmythology therefore are very popular even today. Since India is also very rich in its folklore, much effort is made for discovering and preserving its folk literature.

A sruvery of the existing books for children has revealed that more than 55% are story books and only about 12% are science books. Biogmaphies of great men and women are also in demand. There are some books now on science fiction and adventure stories and these are becemming more and more popular. Children's pocket books have proved successful and quite a few publishers have taken up their publication.

Comics are children's favourites everywhere. A leading Indian publisher, India Book House, has carried out with tremendous success the experiment of presenting mythological and historical stories through the medium of strip cartoons. They have exploited this medium for presenting something wholesome and not horror stories which are associated with comics and may have a harmful effect on the child.

Although translations of classics from all over the world are available in Indian languages there is a greater interest now in translating from one Indian language into another.

There are still some areas where a lot more is required to be done, e.g., picture books for pre-school going children, science fiction, and books for the young adult.

After a decade of rapid development in the last two years, the

pace has slightly slowed down owing to the recent paper crisis and the rising cost of production. Publishers in India have realised the importance of co-publishing since this is the only way of bringing down the cost. Some enterprising Indian language publishers have joined together and launched a co-publication programme which would be of great value in a country like India where the market is limited because of multiplicity of languages. It has been realised that co-publication is the only answer to the problem, and this has led to a new trend of thought in the field of publishing.

As our chief concern is not only to bring out good books but keep the cost within the reach of the maximum number of children, co-publishing will go a long way in achieving this.

In the end I would like to thank the organisers again, and I would like to repeat that this conference here has met not to think of Indian children, Iranian children or even Asian children, but all children. All those who are writing, illustrating and printing for children are engaged in a very serious job, involving great responsibility with far reaching effects for, as a Japanese proverb says, " The soul of the three year old does not change for a hundred years! "